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AUTHOR Miner, Norris
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ABSTRACT

This study compared the effectiveness and efficiency of two alternative methods for determining the status of graduates of Seminole Community College. The first method involved the identification of graduates, design and mailing of a questionnaire, and analysis of response data, as mandated by the state. The second method compared computer data maintained by the institution to that of the Florida State University System and the State Department of Commerce. Social security numbers of students were common to all three data sets and allowed for identification of a graduate in terms of either further education in a State University System institution or employment/unemployment status as defined by the Department of Commerce. The computer comparison method was somewhat constrained inasmuch as students pursuing an education out-of-state or in private colleges could not be followed-up and the Department of Commerce data was limited to persons eligible for unemployment compensation. However, low cost, a higher rate of response, consistency of statewide data collection and reporting, and elimination of the response bias inherent in questionnaire surveys were felt to more than offset any disadvantages. Tabular data are included in this paper showing comparisons between the results obtained using the two alternative methods and pooled results. (JDS)

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SEMINOLE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

THE PROBLEM WITH THE PLACEMENT STUDY

Norris Miner

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Flip Wilson's character, Geraldine, is want to say, "What you sees is what you gets." What people see in The Florida Community College Placement Report (see Appendix A) could "get" some colleges if the reader does not understand the bottom line - "Placement Status Unknown." However, "Placement Status Unknown" is not the kind of "grabber" that gets one's attention. This paper addresses some of the problems which could be created if the bottom line is ignored and the responses are treated as a true population sample.

The Division of Community Colleges of the Florida Department of Education, acting under a mandate of the Legislature of the State of Florida, required the Community Colleges of the State to conduct a placement study of all persons who had completed a prescribed program of study at the Colleges during the academic year 1975-76. The report was due March 1, 1977.

The study examined the present status of the program completer (graduates). The relationship of this status to the objectives of the program form one measure of the effectiveness of the program. Student objectives are not considered in the study, only program objectives.

A separate report is required for each program. Graduates are first separated by race and sex and then classified into one of the following placement fields.

- A. Employed fulltime, in-field trained or related.
- B. Other employment (not in related field).
- C. Continuing education at a higher level.
- D. Unemployed - seeking employment (work).
- E. Not available for placement.
- F. Placement status unknown.

A computer card file of Associate of Arts and Associate of Science graduates containing the graduate's social security (S.S.) number and program of study was matched with the total college credit file for 1975-76. A list of graduates, classified by program, race, and sex, was produced together with a set of mailing labels.

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At the time of the study, data on Seminole Community College students in programs was maintained in two separate computer files, college credit and non-credit.

Machine processible completion data were not readily available for the non-credit program students. Therefore, a listing of these students was provided by the individual program teachers together with teachers' personal knowledge of student placement.

Questionnaires were sent to all credit program completers and to non-credit program completers if there was no indication of placement provided by the teacher.

The cost in both time and money associated with such a mail-out study, together with the inherent questionable results and the ultimate utilization of those results, was a major concern to the colleges of the state. Variable rates of response between the colleges and the possibility of response bias made the inevitable comparisons deceptive, if not damaging.

The member colleges of the Florida Inter-institutional Research Council (IRC) took as a project an alternate method of obtaining the information. The IRC study used computer input data containing the graduate's social security number and program completed. These data were then merged with the third quarter (ending September, 1976) Department of Commerce files. The Department of Commerce files contain employment data on all persons in the state who are eligible for unemployment compensation. For every match in social security number with graduate files, the number of weeks worked, total wages, and the code for the employer were obtained. The graduate files were then merged on social security number with the State University System (SUS) student master file for Term I of 1976-77. If there was a match with the SUS tape, the University and program were obtained. GPA was not available.

Previous research had originated with the SUS files, using the college of origin field of these files to identify the community college transfer. However, if the student stopped-out after a term or took courses at another college or university, the SUS fields would no longer carry the college code of the college of completion. Accessing the SUS tapes with local college data which contained the SS number eliminated the misses which could occur under the previous method.

In order to examine the validity of the two alternate methods of study, each college agreed to use both methods in order to produce a comparative study. The diversity of the offerings among the member colleges and the availability of data precluded the inclusion

of non-credit programs within the IRC study. This paper will examine some aspects of the studies as they relate to college credit students from Seminole Community College.

The IRC study had well defined constraints. First: only students pursuing education in the SUS would be discovered. Out-of-state and private university students would not appear as continuing further education. Second: the employer occupational code would be obtained and not the occupational code of the graduate.

The advantages of the IRC study seemed greater than the disadvantages introduced by the defined constraints. Further, the comparative studies could provide insight into adjustments necessary to make reasonable interpretations of the IRC study. The following were some of the advantages anticipated in the IRC study. First: the IRC study was expected to provide a greater response. Second: any errors introduced through self-reported data would be eliminated. Third: data collection and reporting would be consistent among the colleges. Fourth: response bias, if it existed, would be eliminated. Fifth: the method would be less expensive than mailing questionnaires and processing the responses.

A field testing of the Seminole Community College questionnaire was conducted on a sample of fifty Term I graduates in June, 1976. Twenty-seven (54%) students responded. A revised questionnaire was mailed to the students who did not respond to the first questionnaire and to all other graduates in December, 1976. (See Appendix B) A total of 248 (56%) out of 443 students responded to the two mailings. The students responses are summarized in Table I.

TABLE I

SCC QUESTIONNAIRE		NUMBER	%
A. Employed full-time in-field trained or related.		5	2.0
B. Other employment (not in related field).		27	10.9
C. Continuing education at a higher level.		202	81.5
D. Unemployed - seeking employment (work).		6	2.4
E. Not available for placement.		7	2.8
F. Placement status unknown.		1	0.4
	TOTAL	248	100 ⁽¹⁾

(1) Percent in this study will not always add to 100 due to rounding of individual entries.

The first information from the IRC study was obtained by matching graduate data with SUS tapes first. If a match was made with the SUS tape, the individual was removed from the list with the necessary supplementary data from the SUS tape. The remaining individuals were then matched with Department of Commerce tapes.

The IRC study did not provide direct information on related and non-related employment in this phase of the study. Further work will have to be done to establish compatible program codes between program completers and the codes used for employers on the Department of Commerce tapes. A second phase of the IRC study should provide further information and some solutions to the problem.

The IRC study provided direct information on numbers employed and in the SUS. Employment was divided into full-time and part-time by using \$92 per week as a dividing point. Department of Commerce data do not include full-time or part-time status. However, income of \$92 indicated work of at least 40 hours at minimum wage or wages above minimum for shorter hours. Data from the IRC study should be interpreted with this arbitrary criteria in mind. Table 2 shows the results of this part of the study.

TABLE 2

IRC TOTAL STUDY

	NUMBER	%
Not found on either tape	76	17.2
Employed part-time	37	8.4
Employed full-time	120	27.1
In the SUS	210	47.4
TOTAL	443	100

Treating a match with either the Department of Commerce or SUS tapes as a response to the study allows for a comparison of response data from the two studies. The comparison is necessary to determine the validity of assumptions made from the responses of either study and will allow an examination of the possibility of response set or bias. Table 3 treats the IRC data as response data by eliminating the 76 misses in the IRC study.

TABLE 3

IRC RESPONSE STUDY

	NUMBER	%
Employed part-time	37	10.1
Employed fulltime	120	32.7
In the SUS	<u>210</u>	<u>57.2</u>
TOTAL	367	100.0

When the results of the two studies were merged to form a pooled study, all but 24 of the students were accounted for. Table 4 gives the results of the pooled study.

TABLE 4

POOLED STUDIES

	NUMBER	%
Not found	24	5.4
Employed	137	30.9
In advanced education	<u>282</u>	<u>63.6</u>
TOTAL	443	100.0

Table 5 treats the pooled data on a return basis by removing the students not found in either study.

TABLE 5

POOLED RESPONSE STUDY

	NUMBER	%
Employed	123	29.4
In advanced education	282	67.3
Other	<u>14</u>	<u>3.3</u>
TOTAL	419	100.0

Table 6 provides a comparison of the three studies.

TABLE 6

COMPARISON OF STUDIES
(PER-CENT)

	SCC	IRC	POOLED
Completion rate	56.0	82.8	94.6
Response rate			
Employed	12.9	42.8	29.4
Advanced education	81.5	57.2	67.3
Other	5.6		3.3

If the responses in either of the two studies were treated as a true random sample, errors would result. The College questionnaire study would indicate 81.5% of the students were in advanced education. The IRC study shows 47.4% and pooled data 67.3%. Even if every one of the missing people were in one category, the pooled data must be within five per-cent of the real number. The true number must be between 63.6% and 69.1%.

Sixteen of the twenty-four graduates not accounted for in the original studies have been traced. Eleven are continuing their education with seven delayed entrants to the SUS, two at Rollins and two at out-of-state schools. The other five are working. The pooled response percentage data are not effected.

The college study illustrates a strong bias in respondents. It is obvious that our graduates who continue to advanced education are also those who will better respond to placement questionnaires. The college will furnish IRC with the results of the questionnaire study to try to determine if other errors or bias exist in the self reported data.

The defined constraints built into the IRC study made a low ratio of graduates in advanced study inevitable since out-of-state and private college or university students could not be identified. A "point in time" problem also became apparent. A study of students who responded to the Seminole questionnaire as attending a SUS member institution and who were not identified on the SUS tape showed intended or real delayed enrollment past the fall term. This result is consistent with other studies which show that the community college student does not consider the "stop-out" as a real interruption of his/her educational plan. The present study would indicate that about 25% of our advanced study students will not appear in a study using only fall term SUS information.

Table 7 gives a breakdown of advanced education by college, university, location, or type from the combined study.

TABLE 7

PLACEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION

	NUMBER	%
University of West Florida	3	1.1
University of South Florida	9	3.2
University of Florida	25	8.9
Florida Technological University	171	60.6
Florida State University	17	6.0
Florida Atlantic University	3	1.1
Florida A and M University	1	0.4
Rollins	32	11.3
Other State Private	4	1.4
Out-of-State	17	6.0
TOTAL	282	100

The combined studies indicate that future placement studies should be conducted along the lines of the IRC study. The cost of college studies, the lower response rates, and the bias of responses make the questionnaire method the least attractive of the two approaches. Further analysis of the pooled data will provide for reasonable adjustments in the IRC data at both the state and local level. If properly financed and supported, checks could be made on the method at established time periods with either sample or total population studies. The cost of a total study each year would be prohibitive. Inasmuch as the studies are only one indicator of the effectiveness and accountability of college programs, the information contained in the IRC study would seem sufficient if the user is aware of the limitations of the data.

The IRC study has the further advantage of providing data for the examination of many additional questions. IRC will produce a study on the validity of such self reported data as salary, GPA and university major. The data also illustrates the continuing pattern of the combination of education and employment that is so prevalent at the community college level. How extensive is this? How long does it last? What effect does this employment have on time required to receive an advanced degree? The IRC study has a built-in potential for longitudinal study. The study could be replicated with the same population for any number of years. Questions on "stop-out", success, persistence, grading patterns, and many others could be addressed by this means, cheaply and with an assurance of better compatibility among the colleges.

Geraldine, as far as the IRC study, we "likes what we sees" and - you're not too bad either!



SEMINOLE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

SANFORD, FLORIDA 32771

(305) 323-1450

Management Systems Office

December 10, 1976

Mr. John Doe
2912 Walnut Crest Drive
Sanford, Fla 32771

Dear Mr. Doe:

State law and regulations of the State Department of Education require Seminole Community College to report on the placement status of our graduates.

Although the system of reporting requires that we identify your questionnaire with your name and social security number, you may rest assured no data will be released on an individual basis. The graduate file we are building shall be confidential.

Would you help us by completing the questionnaire and making any necessary corrections on the data we have on you? A postage-free, self addressed envelope is enclosed for your convenience.

Please feel free to call on the College for assistance in educational or job placement should you need help. Use the back of the questionnaire to add any comments about our services and programs you feel would aid us in our efforts to better serve our students. We need and value your opinions.

Thanks for your help.

Sincerely,

Norris Miner
Systems Officer

NM:at

PLACEMENT INFORMATION

Appendix B

Page 2

Address Correction if Necessary

Mr. John Doe
2912 Walnut Crest Drive
Sanford, Fla 32771

Associate of Arts Term II 1975-76

Please check the appropriate response that best describes your personal degree of satisfaction with your education at Seminole.

None _____ Little _____ Moderate _____ Much _____ Great _____

Please check the appropriate numbered statement and complete all parts of the statement which apply to you.

☐ 1. I am presently continuing my education at:

_____ Florida Atlantic University	_____ University of Miami
_____ Florida International University	_____ University of North Florida
_____ Florida State University	_____ University of South Florida
_____ Florida Technological University	_____ University of West Florida
_____ University of Florida	_____ Other _____

My grade-point average at this institution is:

_____ Less than 1.50	_____ 2.50 to 2.99
_____ 1.50 to 1.99	_____ 3.00 to 3.49
_____ 2.00 to 2.49	_____ Over 3.50

My program of study at this institution is _____

☐ 2. I am employed full-time: Job Title _____

Firm Name _____

Address _____

My salary is _____

☐ 3. I am awaiting an opening in : Education _____ Employment _____

☐ 4. I am not available for full-time work or education at this time.

If you have checked number 2 or 4, do you intend to continue your education?

Yes _____ No _____

Thank you! Now add any comments and slip this in the envelope and send it to us.

PROGRAM CODE _____
 PROGRAM TITLE _____
 CAMPUS _____
 AA-1, Phase II-A

PHASE II
 PLACEMENT AND FOLLOW-UP STUDIES

Appendix A

College _____
 Prepared By _____
 Date Prepared _____

Occupational Program Type: ☐ Post-Secondary Technical ☐ Post-Secondary Vocational	Program Length: ☐ Semester Credit Hours ☐ Clock Hours	Completion Award Type: ☐ Associate of Arts ☐ Associate of Science ☐ Technical Certificate ☐ Associate of Applied Science ☐ Certificate of Applied Science ☐ Certificate of Training
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Date Categories	Non-Resident Alien		Asian or Pacific Islander		American Indian or Alaskan Native		Black (not of Hispanic Origin)		Hispanic		White (not of Hispanic Origin)		TOTALS		
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Total
1. PLACEMENT															
A. Employed full-time in field trained or related field															
B. Other employment (not in related field)															
C. Continuing Education at a higher Level															
D. Unemployed - Seeking Employment (work)															
E. Not available for Placement															
F. Placement status unknown															
G. Total (Same as Item 2 on AA-1, Phase I)															

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
 LOS ANGELES

AUG 19 1977

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR
 JUNIOR COLLEGES